THE HISTORY OF

ROCK

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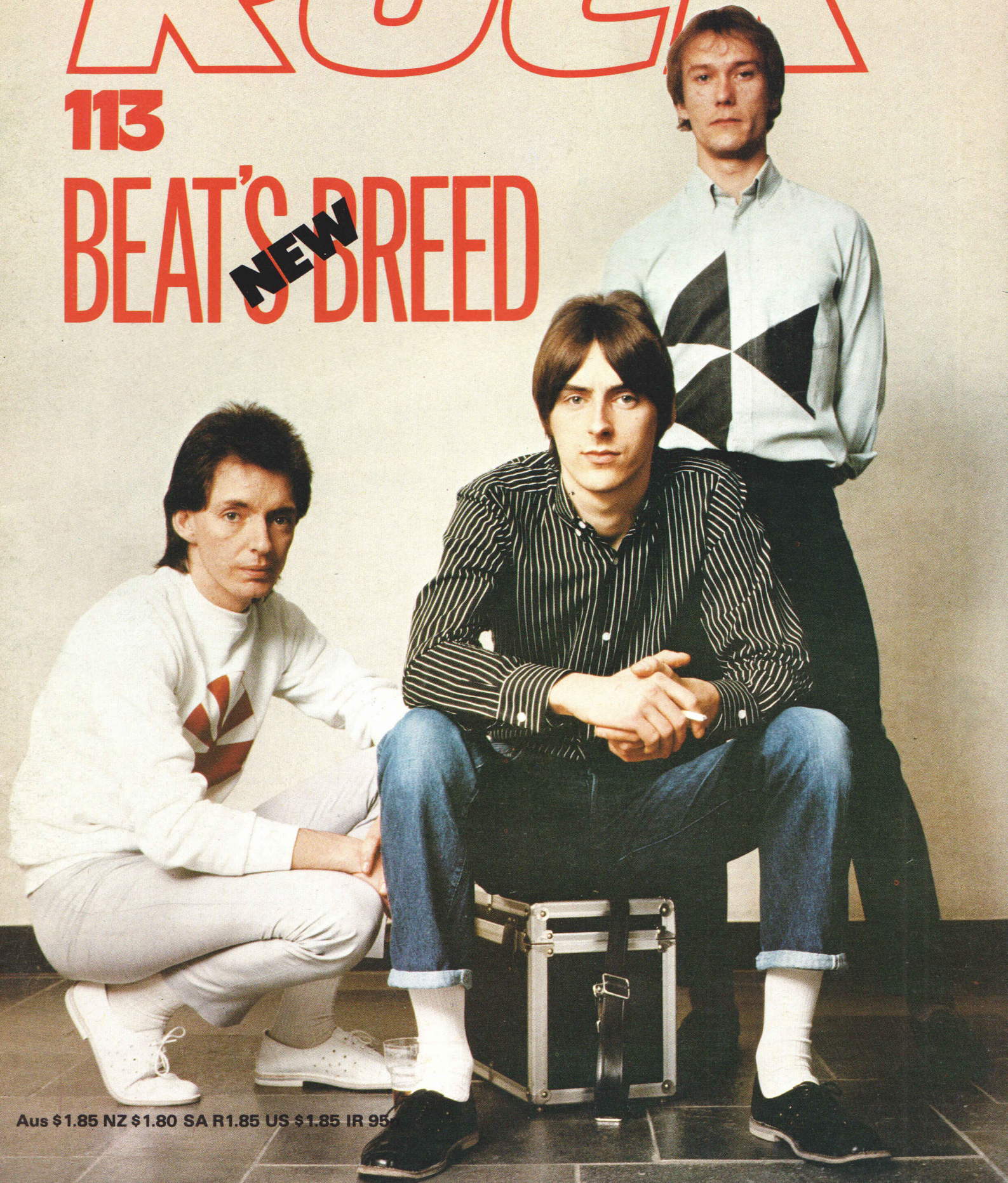

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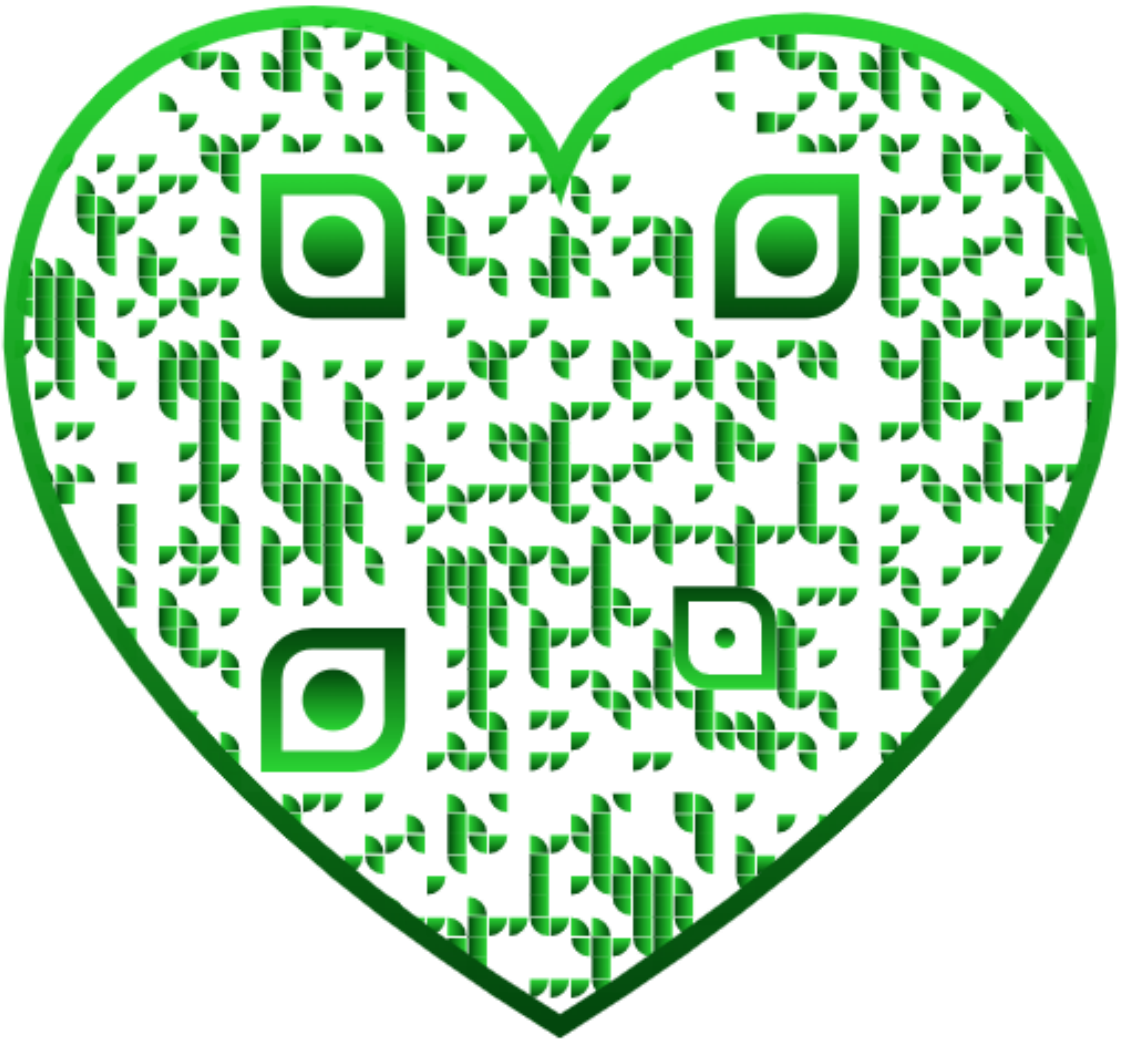

THE HISTORY OF ROCK

Published weekly by Orbis Publishing Limited
Orbis House, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

Volume 10 Issue 113

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Acknowledgements

Janette Beckman 2247(B); **Fin Costello** 2249; **Andre Csillag** 2247(Tl); **Jill Furmanovsky** 2256, 2257(B); **Kobal Collection** 2259(Inset); **London Features International** Front cover, 2241, 2242(T, C, B), 2245, 2246(B), 2248, 2250(Tl, Tr), 2250/2251, 2254, 2257(T), 2258(T, B), 2259, 2260(B); **Klad McNulty** 2243; **Pictorial Press** 2255(T); **Barry Plummer** 2255(B); **David Redfern** Inside back cover; **Rex Features** 2247(Tc), 2253, 2260(T); **Star File/Bob Gruen** 2252; **Star File/Steve Joester** 2246(T); **Star File/Laurie Paladino** 2247(Tr); **WEA Records** Back cover. Photo retouching by **Roy Flooks.** Discographies compiled by **Darren Crook.**

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In the aftermath of punk, the emphasis shifted away from London to the many thriving regional scenes in the UK. Manchester spawned Factory records and their biggest act, Joy Division: Liverpool produced Eric's club, Zoo Records and a whole network of musicians out of which Echo and the Bunnymen, the Teardrop Explodes and Wah! would emerge. In Edinburgh, Postcard Records, launched Orange Juice and Aztec Camera, while Ireland's U2 carried a torch for Christianity and traditional guitar rock.

The History of Rock Price U.K. 75p I.R. 95p Aus. & N.Z. $1.85 S.A. R1.85 U.S.A. $1.85.

How to obtain copies of The History of Rock Copies are obtainable by placing a regular order at your newsagent or by taking out a subscription. **Subscription rates:** For six months (26 issues) £23.00; for one year (52 issues) £46.00. Send your order and remittance to Rock Subscriptions, Punch Subscriptions Services, Watling Street, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK2 2BW., being sure to state the number of the first issue required.

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Second Time Around

Sixties beat bounced back in the wake of the new wave

To borrow a well-known catchphrase from the early days of Stiff Records, power pop was very much a case of 'yesterday's sound today'. It fused together some of the best elements of mid-Sixties pop music – the Beatles, Byrds, Kinks, Who, Creation, Easybeats and the like – with contemporary perspectives and production techniques. Initially coined in the mid Seventies by US critic Greg Shaw to describe bands like Big Star, the name was soon to become an umbrella term for such acts as Nick Lowe, the Rich Kids, the Boomtown Rats, the Jam, the Pretenders and other acts with obvious Sixties influences.

Pure pop for now people

By the early Seventies, pop had become something of a dirty word, a synonym for middle-of-the-road recordings that lacked any real substance, with very few musicians showing any interest in a form that had been, in its heyday, the heart of the Top Thirty. Aside from glitter rockers like Sweet, who saw the virtue of the three-minute pop song and tried to put some fun and excitement back into the proceedings, there were virtually no groups interested in continuing the pop traditions of the mid Sixties. It was not until the onslaught of punk that pop's fortunes began to look up again.

Singles were suddenly back in fashion and the three-minute pop song back in vogue, albeit in a somewhat less melodic form than in the Sixties. The Sex Pistols and contemporaries reached the charts and found a young audience who were searching for new values. While the punks' angry brand of music found commercial success, a few old hands like Nick Lowe borrowed the brash excitement of punk and tailored it to a pop sensibility to produce something akin to 'power pop'. Lowe's 1977 EP *Bowi* described itself as 'Pure pop for now people', indicating that pop music was about to undergo a fresh phase of credibility.

Many of the early punk records were similarly inclined, marrying aggression and passion together with plenty of pop hooks to achieve a commercial sound. The Jam's first hit, 'In The City', had strong overtones of the

Above: Former Sex Pistol Glen Matlock (left) formed the Rich Kids with drummer Rusty Egan, future Ultravox frontman Midge Ure (centre) and Steve New (right). They failed to find public acceptance, however, and split after the release of a single album.

early Who, the Boomtown Rats' first two singles – 'Looking After Number One' and 'Mary Of The Fourth Form' – owed much to the R&B of the early Rolling Stones, while the Pretenders first hit, 'Stop Your Sobbing', was a cover version of an old Kinks' song. But while these three bands managed to develop distinctive styles of their own and achieve high levels of commercial success, there was a whole host of other groups operating in the late Seventies whose strict allegiance to the sounds of the Sixties proved to be an obstacle to musical evolution.

Suits and boots

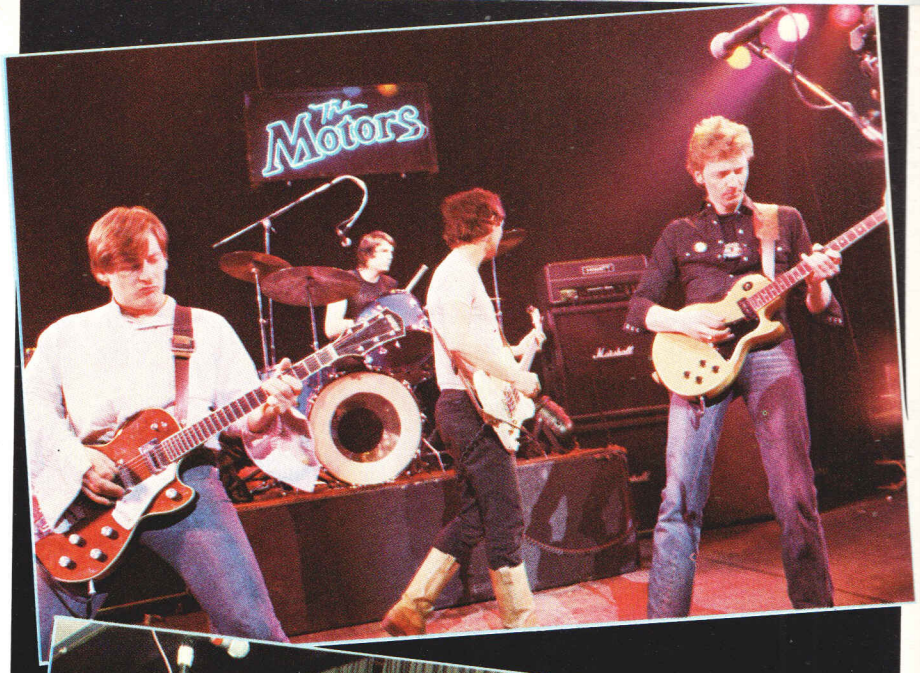
It was into the volatile environment of 1977 that the Pleasers were born, a band who were to become the face of the power-pop fad. Decked out in dark suits, red Cuban-heel boots, white tab-collar shirts and knitted ties, Steve McNenery (guitar), Bo Benham (bass), Dave Rotchelle (drums) and Chris Alexandra (guitar – later replaced by Nick Powell) were touted as the new Beatles.

They looked and sounded custom-made for the role, as if they had just walked straight out of 1964, with a wholesome, clean-cut image and bright commercial sound that was completely at odds with the over-the-top anti-fashions of punk. Calling their sound 'Thamesbeat', the combo played an updated form of Merseybeat very reminiscent of the Searchers and the Beatles, adding punk vitality to the beat style of old and thus making it more acceptable to the youth of the mid Seventies.

By late 1977, the novelty of punk rock was fading rapidly, and music magazines were searching for a new phenomenon. They were not slow to hype the merits of power pop. Pictures of the Pleasers and other like-minded contemporaries were plastered across the pages of the rock press, and numerous other power-pop outfits were to surface nationwide during the early months of 1978. There were the Smirks from Manchester, whose quirky version of British beat was rewarded with a contract from the American independent label Beserkley; Southend's Tonight dressed the part in suits, white shirts and slender ties and notched up a UK Number 14 hit with 'Drummer Man'; while the Motors, formed by ex-members of pub-rock group Ducks Deluxe Nick Garvey and Andy McMasters, blended punk energy with jangling guitars reminiscent of the Byrds and the Searchers for their single 'Dancing The Night Away'.

The Yachts' debut 45, 'Suffice To Say', was dominated by clean vocal harmonies, Farfisa organ and a very catchy melody, while the Rich Kids, formed by ex-Sex Pistol Glen Matlock and ex-Slik member Midge Ure, drew on a variety of backgrounds from the classy UK Sixties pop of the Small Faces and the Kinks through the glam-rock of the New York Dolls to the teenybop of the Bay City Rollers. And then there were the Stukas, the Jags, Advertising, the Boys, the Boyfriends, the Speedometers, the Sneaks and more . . .

By the spring of 1978, with Nick Lowe's 'I Love The Sound Of Breaking Glass' nearing the top of the UK singles charts, and a whole crowd of new acts bearing the torch for a new, credible brand of pop, it looked as if rock was



entering a new era. But, in fact, the power-pop craze burned out as swiftly as it had arrived. As David Brown wrote in *Sounds*: 'Suddenly no one wants to be called power pop. No sooner had the phrase been established than it became uncool.' The Pleasers failed to capitalise on the initial surge of interest in them and petered out after a couple of flop singles, possibly because both their image and their music lacked any real spark of imagination. The Rich Kids also proved to be something of a spectacular failure; despite their undeniable talent and a handful of strong singles – notably the excellent 'Ghosts Of Princes In Towers', which successfully united a Sixties-style melody with feisty rock and a lavish production courtesy of ex-Bowie sidekick Mick Ronson – they never found public acclaim.

Lost innocence

This lack of commercial success did not deter others from trying the power-pop formula, however, and the latter months of 1978 saw the emergence of the Records, arguably the best British purveyors of the genre. In Will Birch, ex-drummer of the Kursaal Flyers, and guitarist John Wicks, the Records had a highly gifted songwriting team; the group's debut single, 'Starry Eyes', was a vitriolic put-down of the music industry that mixed a pounding arrangement, full of punk's zest, with the guitar sound that the Byrds had created on 'Eight Miles High'.

The ensuing album, *Shades In Bed* (1979), confirmed the group's promise, with songs like 'Girls That Don't Exist' and 'Up All Night' showing that power pop could be more than just love songs set to a Sixties beat. Despite some popularity in the US, where their record company failed to promote them adequately, the Records failed to take off in their home country – perhaps because, like other bands of that ilk, they could never quite capture the essential naivety and innocence that had been at the heart of the best Sixties pop music.

Power pop didn't completely disappear, however; during the early Eighties it resurfaced in other guises, notably in 'new psychedelic' bands like Mood Six and High Tide and in yet another band of Beatle soundalikes, Scarlet Party, whose lead singer Graham Dye was constantly compared with the young John Lennon. But again, despite their charm, the new power-pop acts met little public acclaim: for, in relying so heavily on the sound and style of the past, they were missing one vital ingredient for sustained commercial success – originality.

NIGEL CROSS

Power-pop roll-call: the Motors (opposite top), Beatle-clones the Pleasers (opposite below) and Elvis Costello soundalikes the Jags (opposite bottom). Below: The Smirks sign on as the boom fades.

THAT'S entertainment

From Mod to Motown with Paul Weller and the Jam

IT WAS DURING the climax of their success in 1982, with a Number 1 album and single behind them, that Paul Weller, the Jam's singer, songwriter and guitarist, seems to have realised that the group was finished. The band's achievements had been impressive; for five years, they had been one of the most vital and exciting British rock bands of the period. They had established a unique rapport with their large audience based on their down-to-earth image and obvious sincerity, while their songs combined sharp social observation and anger and frustration at society's injustices with powerful, Sixties-influenced pop.

But Weller was not content to dwell on past successes. His interest in soul music was a direction he suspected he would be unable to follow within the group. More importantly, for someone who believed in communicating ideas and being judged on his merits, the adulation surrounding the Jam was becoming stifling. 'I wanted all we have achieved to stand for something,' Weller explained to the fans in a statement printed in the music press. 'The longer a group continues the more frightening the thought of ever ending it becomes – that is why so many of them carry on until they become meaningless. I've never wanted the Jam to get to this stage.'

Jamming in the city

The Jam developed from a schoolboy outfit started by Weller (born 25 May 1958) and his best friend Steve Brookes in their home town of Woking, Surrey. They drafted in Dave Waller, another friend from school, and then an older drummer, Rick Buckler (born 6 December 1955). Waller soon left, being replaced by another schoolfriend, Bruce Foxton (born 1 September 1955); he originally played guitar, but soon exchanged it for Paul's bass.

Paul's father John had encouraged his son from the beginning and was now acting as their manager; he realised that the band would have to break into the London club circuit if they were ever to get away from playing rock'n'roll covers and soul songs at weddings and Woking pubs. Luckily, he managed to fix up the occasional gig at the Greyhound pub in Fulham, where he knew the manager. While they were paying their dues around the London pub and club scene – meanwhile saying goodbye to Steve Brookes, who was not that keen on becoming a pop star – Paul, at the time a Mod, had his first encounter with punk.

The message that the Clash were hammering home about the gulf between rock stars and their audience seemed particularly pertinent to him – and it was that same group, breakfasting in a nearby café, who witnessed one of the Jam's more audacious stunts when they simply set up and started playing in Soho Market one Saturday morning. That market performance attracted some complimentary press attention and, after a few more months gigging at clubs like the Roxy, the 100 Club and the Nashville, they were signed to the Polydor label early in 1977 for the ludicrously small sum of £6000.

Their first single, 'In The City', was released in April 1977 and reached Number 40 after an appearance on BBC-TV's 'Top Of The Pops'; an album of the same name, which was quickly knocked together and released in May 1977, made it to Number 20. The opening chords of the first track, 'Art School', echoed 'Out In The Street', the first track on the Who's debut album *My Generation* (1965), indicating a major influence on Weller's songwriting and guitar-playing: he even chose to play the semi-acoustic Rickenbacker guitars made popular by Pete Townshend in the Sixties. Weller's early work, and some of the later material, was crammed with the jangling harmonies and brash lyrics of the Sixties groups the Woking schoolboy had discovered as an alternative to the contemporary glam-rock scene he hated.

Many of Weller's early songs offered vivid glimpses of teenage street life and, like Pete Townshend before him, the young lyricist appointed himself as a spokesman for his generation. Townshend was later to point out the similarities between them: 'Paul Weller takes on the whole of British society without a blink . . . he's a big-headed, arrrogant little bugger, exactly how I was at his age.'

This fascination with the Sixties also contributed to the failure of the group's first American tour in 1978. Like another of Weller's heroes, Ray Davies of the Kinks, his songs were simply too English to interest an American audience. Not until their final studio album, *The Gift* (1982), would they begin to do reasonably well in the US charts.

Music for moderns

In Britain, meanwhile, the group were making shaky progress. With some pushing from John Weller, who remained their manager for the group's entire career, they sold out London's Hammersmith Odeon, but their chart success was not quite so spectacular. There were two more singles that year: 'All Around The World', which reached Number 13, and 'The Modern World', which borrowed a riff from the Who's 'Pictures Of Lily' and stuck at Number 36. There was also a second, not particularly inspiring album, *This Is The Modern World,* that appeared in November 1977 and made Number 22 in the LP charts. Weller was having trouble producing material, and their fourth single was a Bruce Foxton composition, 'News Of The World' which, released in February 1978, only reached Number 23. By the spring of 1978, after a second unsuccessful American tour, the Jam were beginning to look like nine-day wonders.

Part of the trouble seems to have stemmed from Weller's love affair with a girl called Gill, whom he had met during the Jam's first British tour. They moved into a flat together in London's Baker Street, and Weller found himself losing the singlemindedness that had once taken his career from strength to strength. Seeing the writing on the wall, he moved back to his parents' house in Woking – maintaining his relationship with Gill, which was to oulive the Jam – and began to concentrate on his music once more. As a result, the Jam made a slow climb back to popularity with two hit singles, a cover of the Ray Davies song 'David Watts' that made Number 25 and 'Down In The Tube Station At Midnight'. This angry and moving song – about a vicious racial attack – was released in October, and reached Number 15 in the charts.

It was followed by one of the Jam's finest albums, *All Mod Cons* (1978). Invigorated by his break from composing and fuelled by his anger at the British class system, Weller was beginning to find his own voice as a songwriter. Songs like '"A" Bomb In Wardour Street', 'Mr Clean' and 'Down In The Tube Station At Midnight' presented vivid, angry slices of everyday life, while 'English Rose' and 'The Place I Love' offered a dreamy, idyllic contrast. More than almost any songwriter since Ray Davies, Weller had an eye for the details of everyday life: 'They smelt of pubs and Wormwood Scrubs/And too many right-wing meetings,' he sang on 'Tube Station'. It was a gift he was to develop on later songs like 'Saturday's Kids' and 'That's Entertainment'.

Around this time, Weller seems to have decided that if the Jam were to stay successful, it would have to become his group completely. 'From All *Mod Cons* on, I never let go of the fucking reins again,' he told the group's biographer, Paolo Hewitt. And, indeed, most of Weller's compositions that were not written in a hurry in the studio were first recorded in demo form with Weller himself playing all the instruments, so that the others would know exactly what sound he wanted. But since Bruce and Rick were allowed to interpret their own parts to some extent, the finished songs were never quite as Weller had envisaged them; and his disappointment with the results was another reason for the Jam's eventual break-up.

The Jam released three singles in 1979: March's 'Strange Town' reached Number 15 and its B-side, 'Butterfly Collector', showed a new, melancholy side to Weller's songwriting; September's 'When You're Young' was a Number 13 hit, and 'Eton Rifles', a wonderfully tragi-comic look at class warfare, shot to Number 3 late in the year.

The Jam in classic Mod pose, from left bassist Bruce Foxton, guitarist Paul Weller and drummer Rick Buckler.

Their fourth LP, *Setting Sons*, released in October, was intended as a concept album about three boyhood friends growing up and growing apart. Several of the songs – 'Thick As Thieves', 'Little Boy Soldiers', 'Wasteland' and 'Burning Sky' – did stick to this plan, while others, like 'Saturday's Kids', were bleak snapshots of English life. Weller's anger at the British class system was as clear as ever; but on *Setting Sons* it was tinged with a sense of frustration and disillusionment that made this the Jam's harshest and gloomiest LP. The album's strongest – and most frightening – song was 'Private Hell', a grim depiction of a middle-aged woman's emotional disintegration as her children leave home.

But Weller lacked the time to complete the concept, so the album was padded out with fillers like 'Girl On The Phone' and a cover of Martha and the Vandellas' 'Heatwave', much to its detriment. The band were bitterly disappointed with the result, although the album reached Number 4 in the charts.

The Jam's smart mohair suits (above) later gave way to a more casual, less deliberately Sixties look (below).

Psychedelic sounds

1980 was a different story. The Jam's March single, 'Going Underground', helped by some sharp marketing from Polydor, went straight in at Number 1, while their follow-up single, 'Start', also made the top spot. The song bore more than a passing resemblance to George Harrison's 'Taxman' on the Beatles' *Revolver* album of 1966, and promotional pictures appeared of the group in psychedelic granny glasses. Weller's explanation was that he'd been 'listening to *Revolver* a lot recently', but it seemed odd to many people that at this advanced stage in his career he should have been producing songs so reminiscent of other people's work.

Underneath its brash pop-art cover, that year's *Sound Affects* album also displayed a strong hippie influence. Having recently read books by Aldous Huxley and Geoffrey Ash, Weller was trying to express the idea that 'material goals had hidden the spiritual ones and clouded our perceptions'.

The opening track, 'Pretty Green', set a lyric about the power of money to an almost folk-song-like melody, while 'Man In The Corner Shop', 'Set The House Ablaze' and the bitterly sarcastic 'That's Entertainment' – which later charted in the UK as a German import single – continued the Jam tradition of social realism. 'Monday', in contrast, was a hauntingly beautiful, Sixties-style love song. Alongside the previously audible influences of the Kinks, the Who and the Beatles, a touch of Motown could be heard on numbers like 'Boy About Town'.

Starting over

Sound Affects was also the end of the road for producer Vic Coppersmith. His careful perfectionism had started to infuriate Weller, who preferred to work much more spontaneously in the studio. Coppersmith had worked on all five Jam albums, the first two in conjunction with Chris Parry who had originally signed the group to Polydor. There was no urgent need for a replacement, however, since the group – bored and fed-up – had decided to take most of 1981 off. Apart from the unmemorable group composition 'Funeral Pyre', a Number 4 hit in the middle of the year, no more was heard from them until their thirteenth single, 'Absolute Beginners', was released in October 1981, and also charted at Number 4.

That record, although no one realised it at the time, was the beginning of the end. Behind the hints on 'Absolute Beginners' of Weller's revived interest in black music – particularly the horns well up in the mix – was his new ambition to develop and progress in a soul direction, something he thought would be impossible within the Jam. Over the previous year, he had also become immersed in projects of his own: his publishing company, Riot Stories, had published a volume of poetry from his old friend Dave Waller; his two record labels, Respond and Jamming, had been set up to help new musicians; he had expressed growing interest in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and had produced a TV programme about class inequality for the BBC's 'Something Else' series.

All in all, these wishes – to progress musically, to be independent and to keep his music political – had been the elements in Weller's personality and work that had made the Jam successful. But they also made it inevitable that he should eventually find it restrictive to work within the format of the group.

Above, from left: Foxton, Buckler and Weller. Right: Paul Weller with his erstwhile hero Pete Townshend.

It was during the sessions for their next album, *The Gift* (1982), that the personality clashes within the group came to a head as Weller made it clear that he thought that Rick Buckler's drumming on one track, 'Just Who Is The 5 O'Clock Hero', had destroyed the effect of the song. Only one official single was taken from the album, the double A-sided 'A Town Called Malice'/'Precious'. These songs showed Weller's preoccupation with soul music, and the single entered the charts at Number 1 in February 1982. The Jam appeared on 'Top of The Pops' on two consecutive weeks, playing both sides of the single – the first band to do so since the Beatles.

The album, which appeared the following month, also went to Number 1, Produced by Pete Wilson, *The Gift* contained some of the Jam's strongest material, notably the two tracks from the single, the album's powerful title track, the moving 'Ghosts' and a remarkable, chilling song called 'Carnation', in which Weller confronted the negative side of human nature. Trumpeter Keith Thomas and saxophone-player Steve Nichol added to the soul feel of the album.

Kicking out the Jam

For Weller, however, the Jam had outlived its useful life. His decision to disband the group became common knowledge between the release of the group's last two singles. 'The Bitterest Pill', an uncharacteristic love song, was released in September and reached Number 2, while November's 'Beat Surrender' – also released as an EP including covers of Curtis Mayfield's 'Move On Up', Edwin Starr's 'War' and the Chi-Lites' 'Stoned Out Of My Mind' alongside another Weller

original, the jazzy 'Shopping' – went to Number 1 in the wake of the split.

Weller's announcement left Bruce Foxton and Rick Buckler shocked and resentful: but Foxton embarked on a solo career, releasing two minor hit singles, 'Freak' and 'This Is The Way', in 1983, while Rick Buckler formed a new band, Time UK, with former Tom Robinson Band guitarist Danny Kustow.

Soul ambition

Paul Weller, meanwhile, had teamed up with Mick Talbot under the name the Style Council, keeping his father as manager. Talbot, who had played keyboards with the Merton Parkas, the Bureau and Dexys Midnight Runners, shared Weller's love of soul music; their first release, 'Speak Like A Child', was a Top Ten hit in the spring of 1983 and carried on where the *Beat Surrender* EP left off. The follow-up, an energetic funk workout called 'Money Go Round', attacked the inequalities of wealth and privilege, and made the Top Twenty. The *Style Council A Paris* EP, a summer Top Ten entry, reflected Weller's preoccupation with European fashions and lifestyles, while the Style Council made the Top Ten once again in November 1983 with 'A Solid Bond In Your Heart'.

Inevitably, the Jam has to be evaluated in terms of Paul Weller's achievement alone. For all his success, he blew new life into political rock (in the widest sense) rather than took it off in any new direction. And for someone who assumed the mantle of a political spokesman, Weller never really devised a coherent political perspective. The idea he expressed on *The Gift*, particularly on the track 'Trans-Global Express', that all leaders should make way for workers' co-operatives, seemed particularly naive when compared with Pete Townshend's angrier, more cynical line 'Meet the new boss, same as the old boss' on the Who's 1971 song 'Won't Get Fooled Again'.

More importantly, for all Weller's idealism and compassion, his music lacked fun. At the same time, he remained that rare phenomenon in rock music – a man of integrity and principle, living relatively simply and using his money to help young kids and speaking honestly for a large – and often disenfranchised – section of his generation and class. It is precisely because of this commitment, which gave his songs their characteristic energy and feel, that so many of them – 'In The City', 'Eton Rifles', 'Man In The Corner Shop', 'A Town Called Malice' – will remain rock classics.

COLIN SHEARMAN

Below: Tales from the riverbank – Weller with fellow Style Councillor Mick Talbot.

THE JAM
Discography

Singles

In The City/Takin' My Love (Polydor 2058 866, 1977); All Around The World/Carnaby Street (Polydor 2058 903, 1977); The Modern World/Sweet Soul Music/Back In My Arms Again/Bricks And Mortar (Polydor 2058 945, 1977); News Of The World/Aunties And Uncles/Innocent Man (Polydor 2058 995, 1978); David Watts/"A" Bomb In Wardour Street (Polydor 2059 054, 1978); Down In The Tube Station At Midnight/So Sad About Us/ The Night (Polydor POSP 8, 1978); Strange Town/ Butterfly Collector (Polydor POSP 34, 1979); When You're Young/Smithers-Jones (Polydor POSP 69, 1979); Eton Rifles/See-Saw (Polydor POSP 83, 1979); Going Underground/Dreams Of Children: The Modern World/Away From The Numbers/ Down In The Tube Station At Midnight (Polydor POSPJ 113, 1980); Start/Liza Radley (Polydor 2059 266, 1980); Funeral Pyre/Disguises (Polydor POSP 257, 1981); Absolute Beginners/Tales From The Riverbank (Polydor POSP 350, 1981); A Town Called Malice/Precious (Polydor POSP 400, 1982); A Town Called Malice (Live)/Precious (Polydor POSPX 400, 1982); The Bitterest Pill/Pity Poor Alfie/Fever (Polydor POSP 505, 1982); Beat Surrender/Shopping: Move On Up/Stoned Out Of My Mind/War (Polydor POSPJ 540, 1982).

Albums

In The City (Polydor 2383 447, 1977); *This Is The Modern World* (Polydor 2383 475, 1977); *All Mod Cons* (Polydor POLD 5008, 1978); *Setting Sons* (Polydor POLD 5018, 1979); *Sound Affects* (Polydor POLD 5035, 1980); *The Gift* (Polydor POLD 5055, 1982); *Dig The New Breed* (Polydor POLD 5075, 1982); *Snap!* (Polydor SNAP 1, 1983).

RAT TRAP

The Boomtown Rats: after the goldrush

ALTHOUGH PUNK ROCK'S heyday is generally recalled in terms of the Sex Pistols' short but turbulent history, the Boomtown Rats must also be credited with a number of important firsts. They were, for example, the first of the 'young, loud and snotty' new-wave bands to get a single on the BBC Radio One playlist ('Looking After Number One' in August 1977), the first of their genre to achieve public acceptability without losing the staunch support of their harder-core fans, and the first successful new-wave combo to emerge from Eire.

Paths of glory

The band was formed in late 1975 as Bound for Glory, a high-speed R&B outfit whose name was stolen from the autobiography of folk singer Woody Guthrie. The group consisted of Garry Roberts (guitar and lead vocals), Johnny Fingers (keyboards), Gerry Cott (guitar), Pete Briquette (bass), Simon Crowe (drums) and Bob Geldof who, at the time, alternated between the posts of manager and lead vocalist. The son of an immigrant Belgian family who eventually worked their way up to the middle classes via a Dublin patisserie and import/export business, Geldof took a variety of jobs after leaving college, including coffee-bar manager, Spanish teacher and rock journalist in Canada. This latter enterprise was to stand him in good stead later in life when he became an arch media manipulator.

The group's *raison d'être* was familiar enough, for as Geldof later explained: '. . . there was nothing happening, Dublin being a microcosm of anywhere else. In the same week as we started, the Pistols started. We'd never heard of them. They'd never heard of us. But they started for essentially the same reasons, and the Ramones started in New York for the same reasons. At that time in Dublin we'd never heard of punk, but we wore what was considered to be outrageous clothing at the time . . . you know, nothing is stronger than an idea whose time has come.

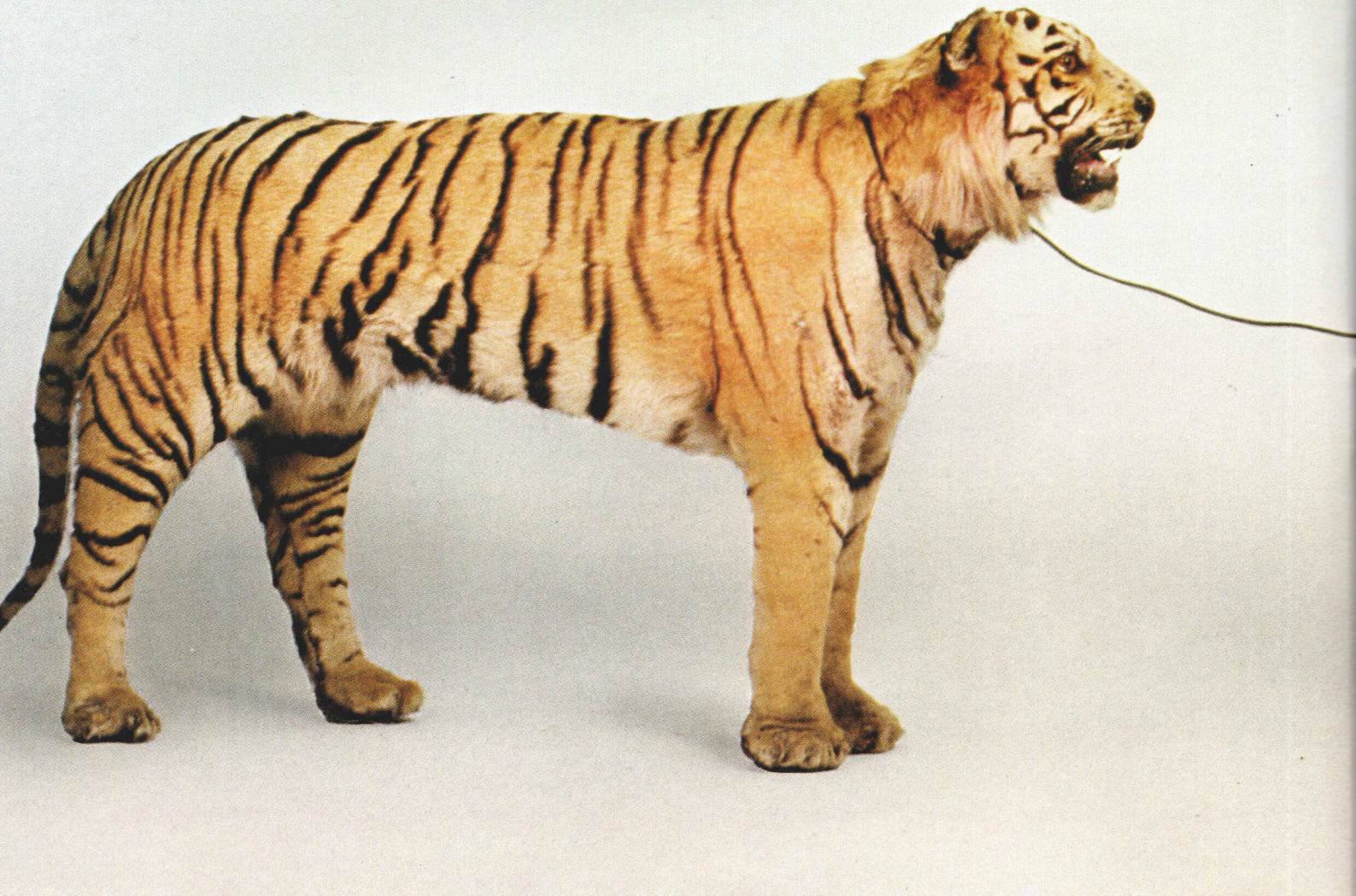
'I've always said we're not a punk band, I imagine the new wave to be a line and at one end is punk and at the other is R&B-influenced rock like the Feelgoods. We're probably somewhere in between . . .'

Pest control

Despite his disclaimers, thousands of teenage punters would identify the newly re-christened Boomtown Rats as standard-bearers for the disaffected, deeply bored youth of the nation. In 1977, the band were signed to Ensign Records and moved to London, where they were able to reach a large, impressionable audience with their melodic, but definitely angst-ridden songs. They quickly established themselves as a top-line new-wave act with their first album, *The Boomtown Rats* (written and rehearsed before they ever left Ireland) which was released in August 1977 and reached Number 18 in the UK charts.

The album afforded hit singles in the speedy R&B and punk overtones of 'Looking After Number One' (Number 11) and 'Mary Of The Fourth Form' (Number 15) but it was with their second album, *A Tonic For The Troops*, released in June 1978, that the band truly made their mark. This reached Number 8 and remained on the LP charts in the UK for 44 weeks, while 'Rat Trap', a single which told of the familiar hopelessness of life in an urban wasteland, made the Number 1 position in the UK in November of that year.

Above: King Rat Bob Geldof, the band's vociferous spokesman, relaxes in luxurious surroundings. Like several other bands, the Rats took their name from a book by William Burroughs.



Cash and controversy

Like the Pistols, Clash *et al*, the Rats' history was rich in controversy. They were banned from playing a triumphant homecoming gig at Dubin's Leopardstown racecourse, local authorities fearing riots and public insurrection, they had a major disagreement with their record label over claimed unpaid royalties which delayed the release of their third album, *The Fine Art Of Surfacing* (1979), and their best-known single, 'I Don't Like Mondays' was not only banned by many American radio stations but also cited as prejudicial to the defence of the teenage girl whose brief moment of infamy it chronicled.

Far left: The Boomtown Rats caged! Left: Singer Bob Geldof flanked by bassist Pete Briquette (right) and guitarist Gerry Cott. Below: Rat with friendly cat.

'Mondays' was Geldof's commentary on a strange and horrific event that took place earlier that year in Santa Ana, California. 16-year-old Brenda Spencer had barricaded herself in a house opposite her school playground. When the school gates opened that morning, she used her father's gun to wound eight of her school chums and kill the headmaster and school janitor, her only explanation being, 'I don't like Mondays – this livens up the day.'

As a piece of social comment, 'Mondays' was certainly astute, but it also proved that eloquence, melody and intelligent arrangements had found their way back into protest music. In 1979 most of the Rats' contemporaries – those still intact, that is – were still thrashing out the same old amphetamine-driven cliches.

In 1979 the Boomtown Rats embarked on an ambitious world tour, taking in markets as diverse as Japan, Canada and Thailand. Although their American fortunes never really took off in the wake of the Brenda Spencer débâcle, they still maintained a loyal following there among hard-core Anglophiles. And even if they failed to understand a word of the band's musical messages, foreign audiences were easily bowled over by the sheer pace and ebullience of their live gigs.

Johnny Fingers brought a rare flamboyance to the keyboards and used the unlikely gambit of wearing pyjamas (on *and* off-stage) and dancing all over the place. Guitarists Pete Briquette and Gerry Cott were every bit as innervating as the most energetic punk strummers of the era *and* could play considerably more than three chords. Stage front, Geldof would strut, cavort, cajole and, of course, sing – in tune! Thus, with the regular addition of tenor sax-player Dave McHale (who re-created the raucous playing that had featured on 'Rat Trap'), the band were able to reproduce their increasingly ambitious recorded arrangements on stage with considerable accuracy.

The material world

Although Bob Geldof was always very much the focal point of the band, the other group members had vital roles to play, even though they might have lacked Geldof's reserves of charisma. Both Crowe and Briquette, for example, were essential to the appeal of the Rats's arrangements, and were also quite able and willing to articulate policy, musical or otherwise. Crowe explained the Rats' philosophy in a 1980 interview, saying that '. . . we want to be around for a while – if we'd produced another "Mondays" or "Rat Trap", we could've done that, but we don't need to.' Crowe went on to say that the band found it more exciting to take risks.

However, Geldof himself admitted that 'I want money because it will buy me individual freedom. It's a materialistic world [and] this world constricts me . . . I don't like it, I just want totally out of this society and the only way I can see out is to have more money than anyone else, to give me choices, options.' Geldof was aware of the danger of using politically loaded lyrics in order to make his pile. 'The crucial point,' he told one reporter, 'is I genuinely don't want to feel that I've got anything to preach or that the band has anything to teach. We're not presumptuous enough to dare to tell people how to run their lives. I don't want kids to come to a political rally when they come to the Rats. I think all revolutions are meaningless, especially ones led by CBS and EMI.'

Coming up for air

1980 found the Boomtown Rats maintaining a high level of popularity. The year's two singles, 'Someone's Looking At You' and the reggae-tinged 'Banana Republic', both made the UK Top Five, while *The Fine Art Of Surfacing*, released the previous October, stayed on the charts for 26 weeks, peaking at Number 7. But by this time, Geldof's glib wisdom, ready wit and endearing brogue had established him as the darling of the chat-show circuit and the gossip columns and his very status as a media figure now began to turn many fans away from the band. 1981's *Mondo Bongo* album reached Number 6 but stayed in the charts a mere seven weeks, while 'The Elephant's Graveyard (Guilty)' only reached Number 26 in the singles charts and 'Never In A Million Years' failed to make the Top Fifty at all.

The group toured sporadically but audiences dwindled and, with the departure of Gerry Cott in 1981 and Geldof further denting his credibility by taking the lead role in Alan Parker's film of the Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, the Rats' ship appeared to be slowly sinking. Somewhat predictably, the music press revelled in the Boomtown Rats' decline. *Mondo Bongo*, admittedly a rather tepid album, received less than favourable reviews – 'There's a helluva lot of depth, decision and *emotion* missing from what is one of the most self-indulgent pop scenarios of late,' commented *Sounds* – while its 1982 follow up, *V Deep*, was almost ignored and only managed to scrape to Number 64 in the LP charts. For a few months, the Boomtown Rats had been kings of the British pop scene, but by 1982, it seemed, all but the most die-hard fans had forgotten them.

It remained to be seen whether, despite the loss of Cott, the departure of long-time manager Fachtna O'Kelly and the media overkill of Geldof and his forthright paramour Paula Yates, the Boomtown Rats could regain their commercial footing in the mid Eighties.

MARK WILLIAMS

Boomtown Rats
Recommended Listening

The Fine Art Of Surfacing (Ensign ENROX 11) (Includes: When The Night Comes, Wind Chill Factor (Minus Zero), Keep It Up, I Don't Like Mondays, Someone's Looking, Diamond Smiles).

TALK OF THE TOWN

How the Pretenders paid the price of success

IN JANUARY 1980, the Pretenders had every reason to feel pleased with themselves. Their debut album had just waltzed into the UK LP charts at Number 1; simultaneously, their third single, 'Brass In Pocket', was staring down at the competition from the top of the singles listings. Three years later, two of them were dead and the future careers of the two survivors looked uncertain.

Mystery achievement

Ever since Chrissie Hynde left the US for London in the summer of 1973, she had been broke, homeless and planning to form a band.

Born in Akron, Ohio, on 7 September 1951, in the bleak American Midwest, Chrissie had grown up with the radio on, and tuned into the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and the Kinks. Even as a child, she had wanted nothing more than an electric guitar in her hands and a stage to play it on: the first group she formed was Sat Sun Mat, which also featured Mark Mothersbaugh, later to resurface with Devo. Graduating from Kent State University with a degree in fine art, her ambitions drew her eventually to London.

A series of chance encounters led to a brief engagement as a writer with *New Musical Express*; she then worked as an assistant at Sex, a King's Road clothes shop run by Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren. Chrissie then returned to Ohio, appearing with Jack Rabbit, a Cleveland bar band, before travelling to Paris to sing in the Frenchies, managed by an acquaintance of hers, Marc Zermati. Six months later, the band split: after several abortive attempts to form a new group, Chrissie decided to head back to London.

A Real recruit

In the summer of 1975, the first strategies for the eventual punk revolution of 1977 were being mapped out by Malcolm McLaren and an assorted gang of would-be musical activists. Having been introduced to this circle when working for McLaren at Sex, Chrissie was soon rehearsing with a variety of intriguing line-ups.

In March 1978, she met Dave Hill, who had just formed his own record label, Real. He signed her up and decided to bankroll her while she continued her search for the

musicians who might spark her songs into vivid life. One of them proved to be Pete Farndon, who had spent the previous year playing bass in an Australian country-rock band called the Bushwackers. For a short time he and Chrissie were lovers, and he helped her organise her group. Chrissie had already found a drummer named Gerry Mackleduff; Pete decided that he was adequate for the job but that they needed a guitarist.

Farndon enlisted James Honeyman Scott, whom he remembered from his native Hereford. They recorded demo versions of Chrissie's 'Precious' and 'Phone Call' and the Kinks' 'Stop Your Sobbing'. Hynde then took the tapes to Nick Lowe, who agreed to produce the Pretenders' first single. Working quickly in studio time donated by Elvis Costello (who was then recording *Armed Forces* with Lowe), he fashioned versions of 'Stop Your Sobbing' and 'The Wait' (a Hynde-Farndon original) that surpassed the expectations even of Chrissie's staunchest supporters.

By now, Martin Chambers, another of Farndon's Hereford connections, had replaced Mackleduff on drums. The Pretenders were thus ready for their first headlining gigs: they played the Moonlight Club in West Hampstead in January 1979. Within weeks, they were on the cover of *Melody Maker*, thanks to a powerful publicity campaign organised by Real's parent company, WEA. However, 'Stop Your Sobbing' was not quite the hit that most critics had predicted, only reaching Number 34. In June the Pretenders released 'Kid', a glorious lament with a vocal performance by Chrissie that seemed capable of melting the sternest heart; it also floundered short of the Top Thirty.

Leading the field

The band at last broke through with the October release of 'Brass In Pocket', an audacious, irresistible piece of self-promotion that seemed to sound better with every play; by January 1980 it was Number 1. The Pretenders cunningly delayed the release of their first LP until the new year, *Pretenders* thus becoming the first Number 1 album of the Eighties.

The Pretenders had a number of advantages over their punk contemporaries that helped to ensure them mass acceptance. Their strong melodies and jangly guitars evoked the golden days of the Sixties beat groups, while Chrissie's passionate singing recalled Dusty Springfield in its mixture of power and vulnerability. These familiar elements were harnessed to a distinctly modern urgency and attack.

But as Europe and America fell under their spell, the Pretenders became intoxicated by their sudden success, acquiring a reputation for excess: alcohol and narcotics seemed to provide powerful antidotes to the exhausting tours the band embarked upon. Hynde's creative muse, too, was having problems. During 1980, the Pretenders released only one new tune, 'Talk Of The Town'. A year later they put out

Opposite: Chrissie Hynde, whose forceful songwriting, singing and playing helped put brass in the Pretenders' pockets. Above: The band on stage, from left Farndon, Hynde, Chambers and Honeyman Scott.

'Message Of Love', which prefaced their second LP, *Pretenders II*.

Released in August 1981, the album was virtually laughed out of town. A darker, more sombre record than its predecessor, its harshness had been dictated by the group's reactions to their success, their growing disenchantment with its attendant pressures and an increasingly compli-

> 'You work so hard for two years to get into a position where you're allowed to make records and get paid for it. And a lot of people really blow it. You've *got* to keep the thing ticking over, you've gotta nurture it like it's something that's alive. You can't leave it for too long or it'll seize up and die . . . Sometimes you can't start over.'
>
> **Chrissie Hynde,** 1983

cated pattern of personal relationships within the band. The music press hated the LP, especially in Britain, and the band's pleasure at its eventual commercial success (and that of a single taken from it, a fine cover of Ray Davies' 'I Go To Sleep' that made Number 7 in the UK), must have been soured by the critical drubbing.

However, the band suffered a far more serious setback when, eight weeks into their US tour, Martin Chambers injured his arm and hand after punching a glass lampshade. The tour had to be postponed, losing them precious momentum and profits. The Pretenders completed their remaining US dates and a world tour by mid 1982, but further unhappiness and tragedy were waiting in the wings. On 14 June, Pete Farndon was sacked, the group claiming that his behaviour had been hopelessly erratic and unreliable. Two days later, James Honeyman Scott was found dead in a friend's flat in West London. The cause of death was attributed to a deadly cocktail of alcohol and cocaine.

Chrissie Hynde and Martin Chambers decided to battle on, recording 'Back On The Chain Gang' with ex-Rockpile guitarist Billy Bremner and bassist Tony Butler, who later joined Big Country. A Number 17 hit in the UK, its success did little to dispel the melancholic atmosphere surrounding the band. Ignoring widespread speculation about their future, Hynde and Chambers busied themselves with finding replacement members. Robbie McIntosh, formerly of Night and Manfred Mann's Earth Band, was recruited on guitar, while Malcolm Foster, previously a Foster Brother, was hired as bass player.

Learning to crawl

In April 1983 Pete Farndon died, killed by a lethal mixture of heroin and cocaine. Although he was no longer part of the group, the death of one who had done so much to realise Chrissie Hynde's musical vision intensified the aura of tragedy that now hung around the group.

After the release of 'Back On The Chain Gang' in September 1982, little was heard from the Pretenders. Chrissie had a child in January 1983 by her former hero, now boyfriend, Ray Davies of the Kinks, and then went back into the studio to record an LP, *Learning To Crawl*, with an assortment of musicians. With the deaths of two of the band's original members, Hynde had had to call upon all her reserves of determination to carry on in the music business. Strumming a tennis racquet in front of her bedroom mirror in Akron, the teenage Chrissie Hynde could not possibly have imagined the bitter cost of fulfilling her ambitions of rock stardom. ALLAN JONES

Pretenders
Recommended Listening

Pretenders (Real RAL 3) (Includes: Brass In Pocket, Mystery Achievement, Lovers Of Today, Up The Neck, Kid, The Phone Call); *Pretenders II* (Real K 56924) (Includes: Louie Louie, Pack It Up, Bad Boys Get Spanked, Talk Of The Town, Jealous Dogs, Day After Day).

The maverick style of Joe Jackson

FROM 'SPIV-ROCKER' to the 'acceptable face of punk', from 'Forties Hep Cat' to sophisticated champagne-and-taxi crooner, Joe Jackson had about as many musical identities as he had watches in his coat on the cover of his second LP, *I'm The Man* (1979). But Jackson was no dilettante, with one ear to the fashion scene and the other to the charts. Instead, the different musical styles that he explored represented expressions of his eclectic taste, and he proved to be one of the most durable artists to emerge from the new wave.

Wide-eyed and legless

Jackson had always been an outsider. Born in Burton-on-Trent in 1955 but raised in Portsmouth, he was an awkward and gawky kid, who suffered from asthma. 'I was a slightly odd teenager,' he once recalled. 'A normal teenager goes to youth clubs and tries desperately to pick up girls and plays football. I didn't do those things.'

As with many adolescent misfits, Jackson turned to music for comfort and solace: he taught himself to play the piano, and at 16 began his formal musical training at the Royal Academy of Music. Although he was rated as a highly promising concert pianist, Jackson was never sure about what he wanted to do until, after three years at the Academy, he turned to rock.

One of his first groups, Edward Bear, was a 'shameless pop band' whose demise led to the formation, in 1974, of Jackson's first major foray into rock, Arms and Legs. The band released three singles but soon broke up due to mismanagement and lack of record-company support. Bassist Graham Maby was to remain a stalwart of Jackson's subsequent bands.

After the failure of Arms and Legs, Jackson returned to Portsmouth where he worked for nine months playing piano at the local Playboy Club. After quitting that job, he spent six months on the road with a cabaret act called Coffee and Cream. But this was 1977, and when Jackson heard bands like the Clash and the Damned, decided to try rock again.

Jackson had been careful with his money and so was able to finance a series of demos, which he pressed into album form. He made the rounds of the record companies and was soundly rejected by them all, but was advised by United Artists to get in touch with Albion Music, a publishing company. John Telfer, who later became Jackson's manager, signed him to a publishing deal and sent his demo to A&M producer David Kershenbaum. Jackson and his band – Maby, Gary Sanford (guitar) and Dave Houghton (drums) – were in the studio with Kershenbaum before a contract was even signed.

Left: Joe introduces 'Sunday Papers', a song from his first LP that poured scorn on the tabloid press.

Recorded live – Jackson claimed there were no overdubs – *Look Sharp!* was completed in a week and a half and was released in February 1979 to unanimously positive reviews. *Rolling Stone* called it 'a stripped-down paean to spontaneous combustion'. Certainly its songs – the Number 13 UK hit 'Is She Really Going Out With Him?', 'Look Sharp' and 'Fools In Love' – with their quirky rhythms, searing guitar riffs and intelligently ironic lyrics were evidence of a unique musical persona, the streetwise neurotic.

After the release of *Look Sharp!*, and its subsequent success on both sides of the Atlantic, Jackson began expounding his idea of 'spiv rock' in order to poke fun at musical categorising. 'I think people always want to put a label on what you do, so I thought I'd be one step ahead of them and invent one myself,' Jackson said years later. He took the idea a step further on his second album, *I'm The Man*, posing on the cover as a spiv – with a polka-dot tie and pencil moustache – selling stolen watches.

I'm The Man contained the same stripped-down pop sound and biting lyrics of the debut album, and was even more successful. Released in the autumn of 1979, it reached Number 12 in the British LP charts, gave Jackson his first Top Ten hit in the UK, 'It's Different For Girls', and firmly established him in the US as one of the stars of the new wave. The highlight of the album was 'On The Radio'; frenetic, but still melodic, this was a triumphant act of revenge. As Jackson put it: 'It's addressed to all the teachers, all the bullies, all the people who wouldn't listen before.'

Jiving with Joe

But Jackson's success brought difficulties. The fickle rock press was turning against him, and at London's Dingwalls he was hit on the head with a bottle by a member of the audience. 'I don't really fit in,' confessed Joe at the time. 'I look a bit odd and I'm easy to take the piss out of because I'm six foot two and I'm going bald.' Because Jackson was feeling increasingly at odds with the rock world, he turned to reggae, releasing a cover version of Jimmy Cliff's 'The Harder They Come' in 1980, and playing keyboards for reggae band the Rasses on three tracks of their *Natural Wild* LP.

His own band's next album, *Beat Crazy*, released in October 1980, also reflected his interest in reggae; highly rhythmic and percussive, it took critics off-guard and, perhaps not surprisingly, was not as successful as the previous offerings. The LP reflected Jackson's uneasiness with conventional pop music and his disillusionment with rock – his liner notes read: '. . . we knew it was destined to failure . . . why did we try?'

Jackson's next project turned out to be even less predictable than *Beat Crazy*; *Jumpin' Jive*, released in the summer of 1981, was a collection of Forties swing standards and although Jackson could not hope to capture the spontaneity and virtuosity of Cab Calloway, Louis Jordan and other 'hep cats', the album displayed his piano skills to good advantage and showed a rich electricism of musical interests. The album was a surprise hit in the UK, reaching Number 14.

New York nights

Following *Jumpin' Jive*, Jackson spent a year in New York, immersing himself in the wide variety of its nightlife and listening to the array of ethnic music that can be found only in that city. The result was Jackson's most successful album, *Night And Day*, released in June 1982. The LP was divided into two parts: the 'Day' side was filled with slow, lush ballads, reflecting a new introspective romanticism. The 'Night' side, meanwhile, was made up of dance music – salsa, R&B, rock, the kind of music to be heard daily on the streets of New York.

Night And Day was an enormous success, particularly in the US, and afforded another hit single in 'Steppin' Out', which reached Number 6 in both the US and UK charts. The album reflected a new maturity; Joe had obviously taken all the myriad styles of music that appealed to him and, instead of aping them as he had in his transitional period, synthesised them into something distinctive and personal.

Above: Bassist Graham Maby joins Joe on the stand. Below: The artist 'feels a song coming on . . .'

From June 1982 to May 1983, Jackson and his new band toured the world to promote *Night And Day*. Between two legs of the tour, Jackson wrote the score to *Mike's Murder*, an off-beat murder movie set against a backdrop of the druggy punk underworld, and the soundtrack album was another success, reaching the American Top Thirty.

By now, Joe Jackson had established himself as an artist with much more than passing appeal; each of his musical forays had been sincere attempts at something new and, although still unpredictable, he had become, if nothing else, a solid, dependable artist. He probably said it best himself: 'I'm going to be around for a long time. It'll all sort itself out.' DEBBIE GELLER

Joe Jackson
Recommended Listening

Look Sharp! (A&M AMID 120) (Includes: Sunday Papers, One More Time, Throw It Away, Is She Really Going Out With Him?, Pretty Girls, Look Sharp!); *Night And Day* (A&M AMLH 64906) (Includes: Cancer, Steppin' Out, Real Men, Chinatown, Another World, Target).

SQUEEZE

An East Side Story of pop promise

IN THEIR TIME, Squeeze were a group that epitomised the misfit; they never slotted neatly into any particular category, fashion or movement. Indeed, their records, especially towards the end of their career, displayed a diversity of style that few groups could equal. They were, in short, a classic pop group, boasting as they did the ingenious songwriting team of Glenn Tilbrook and Chris Difford whose songs allied catchy melodies and hooklines with clever, graphic lyrics and won them from some quarters the unwanted accolade of 'the second Lennon and McCartney'.

Despite the independence of Squeeze's vision and stance, they acquired, at the beginning of their recording career, an association with the punk/new-wave movement of 1976-77. Their debut recording, a three-song EP on Miles Copeland's Deptford Fun City label entitled *Packet Of Three*, appeared in the independent racks in 1977. The content of the record, particularly 'Cat On A Wall', was vaguely consistent with the punk style, but the musicianship displayed indicated that the group were no typical garage-band-made-good. In fact, they had been together for a number of years; Difford, Tilbrook, bassist Harry Kakoulli and Jools Holland, an accomplished boogie-woogie style pianist, were old schoolfriends from Deptford in South-east London; drummer Gilson Lavis, who completed the band, was a seasoned session man who had toured with Chuck Berry and other visiting US artists.

Punks in the disco

They were a motley crew; the angelic Tilbrook sung in a light, melodic style that complemented his looks and played slick, fluid lead guitar, while lyricist Difford looked and sounded rougher, playing scratchy, churning rhythm guitar and singing in a gruff, low-pitched, deadpan style. Holland, invariably dressed in sharp suit and a selection of colourful ties, came over as the archetypal wide-boy complete with shades, huge cigar and fast-talking stage raps. Kakoulli, with shoulder-length hair, and the powerfully-built Lavis completed a visual image that defied stereotyping. Squeeze's first single after signing to the major A&M label, 'Take Me I'm Yours', was a complete break from punk, sung in octave unison by Tilbrook and Difford against a disco beat and Holland's swirling synthesisers. It was a hit, making Number 19 in the UK charts, but the follow-up, 'Bang Bang', flopped.

Ex-Velvet Underground bass player John Cale produced the group's debut album, *Squeeze* (1978), and his influence was evident in the stark arrangements of songs like 'Out Of Control', an edgy slice of hard-rock with schoolboy-smut lyrics. This initiated accusations of sexism that took a

Below: Guitarists Chris Difford (left) and Glenn Tilbrook (centre) on stage with the band's first bassist Harry Kakoulli.

long time for Squeeze to shake off. The title track of their second LP *Cool For Cats* (1979), produced by John Wood, along with the likes of 'Slap And Tickle', 'It's Not Cricket' and the ambiguous 'It's So Dirty' (actually a put-down of sexist attitudes) continued Difford's obsession with nights out with the lads looking for birds and booze. 'Cool For Cats' and 'Up The Junction' both made Number 2 in the UK charts, the latter a sad tale of young marriage doomed to failure sung by Tilbrook to one of his most enchanting melodies. 'Slap And Tickle' also made Number 24 when released as a single, confirming Squeeze's new-found popularity as pop's heirs to Ian Dury's Cockney crown.

In 1980, *Argybargy* saw them developing towards a wider variety of styles such as the mini-opera of 'Separate Beds' the full-blooded pop of 'Pulling Mussels From A Shell' and the swing of 'Wrong Side Of The Moon', written by Holland and Difford and sung by the former. With 'I Think I'm Go-Go' Difford and Tilbrook succeeded in conveying the automaton-like aspects of the pop-star existence without falling into self-indulgence, singing a verse each with appropriate backing textures to suit their contrasting voices. The album saw the debut of John Bentley on bass after Harry Kakoulli had departed, later to resurface with ex-Dart John Dummer in the outrageous True Life Confessions.

Down the Tube

After extensive touring as far afield as Australia, Squeeze also lost Jools Holland; he had begun to contribute songs to the group's records, as well as cutting his own discs on Deptford Fun City, and was looking for an outlet for his considerable piano talents, which had essentially been underused by the group. He formed his own group, the Millionaires, but later found greater success as a television personality, utilising the quick-witted humour that had been an important part of Squeeze's live act as host of 'The Tube'.

Meanwhile, Squeeze hit more turmoil when they forsook Copeland's management in favour of Jake Riviera, who subsequently released them. The association did, however, lead to the recruitment of Ace keyboardist Paul Carrack, who had written that group's only hit single 'How Long?'. Under the production team of Elvis Costello and Roger Bechirian, they went into the studio to record *East Side Story* (1981), an album that was to prove the ultimate example of their supreme pop craftsmanship.

From the standard Squeeze pop fare of 'In Quintessence' and 'Is That Love' to the rockabilly of 'Messed Around', *East Side Story* used a wider than ever range of musical settings for Difford's increasingly eloquent lyrics. 'Vanity Fair' saw Tilbrook's tender vocal set against an orchestra, while 'Someone Else's Heart' showed Difford adopting a softer, more sensitive delivery than he had previously

Top: Squeeze's late-Seventies line-up, from left Difford, Jools Holland, Tilbrook, Gilson Lavis and John Bentley. Above: Holland bids the band farewell at the Albany, Deptford, in August 1980.

attempted. 'Labelled With Love' saw Tilbrook demonstrate how to sing a country and western song with an English accent and gave the group a UK Number 4 hit single, while 'Tempted', which saw Carrack in superb voice, provided the band with their first Stateside success.

A new label

Unfortunately, Carrack did not stay long; his replacement, ex-Sincero Don Snow, played on the final Squeeze album, *Sweets For A Stranger* (1982), contributing some smooth Hammond organ to the single 'Black Coffee In Bed'. Carried by Lavis' drumming and an ingenious bassline from Bentley, with Costello and Paul Young cooing behind Tilbrook's vocal, the song was clearly an attempt to equal the heights of 'Tempted'. The album confirmed this mature 'white-soul' direction, but paled overall in comparison with its predecessor's variety, although Paul Young's subsequent success with the same style suggested that Squeeze's unsophisticated image had not helped fans accept the change.

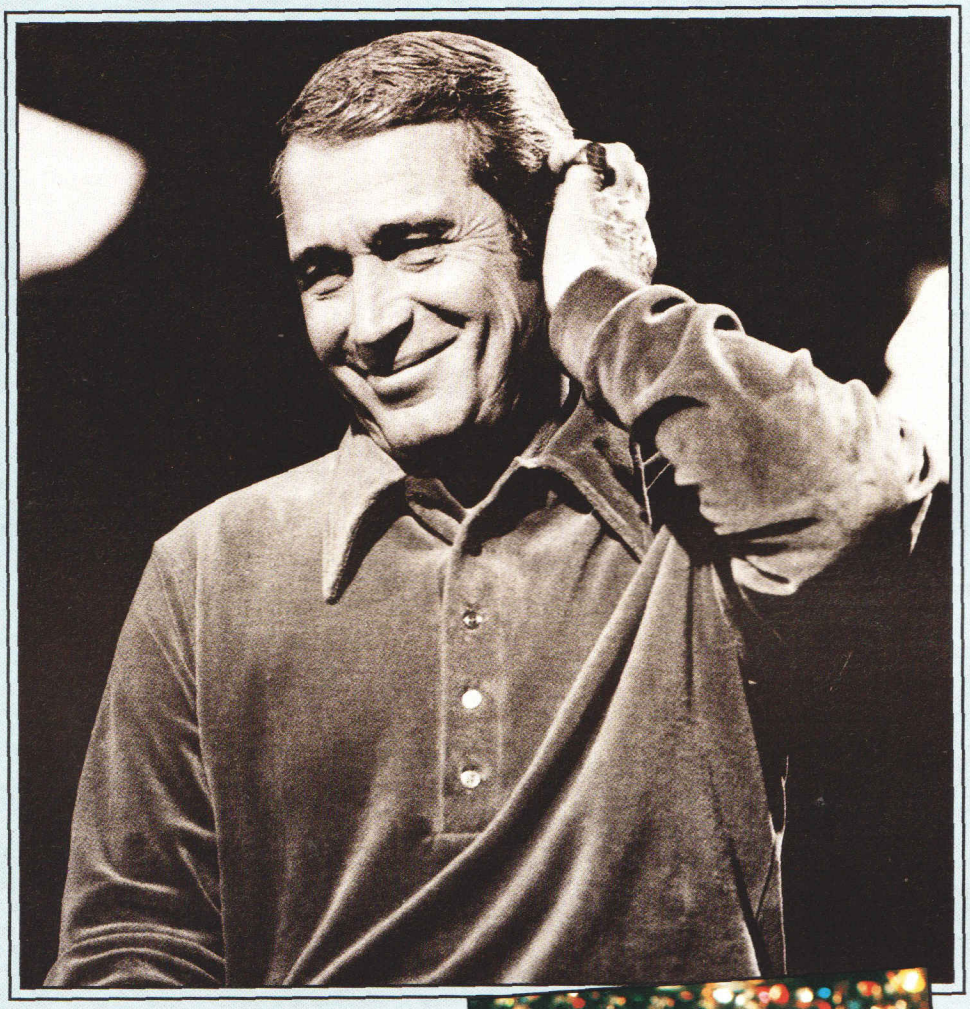
Squeeze subsequently split, having achieved all they could as a group. Their back catalogue continued to prove its popularity, however: a 'greatest hits' compilation, *Singles-45's And Under* (1982) made Number 3 in the album charts, while Difford and Tilbrook's songs were used in a musical, *Labelled With Love*. Tilbrook also became a regular DJ at the Albany Empire in Deptford and continued to write songs with Difford, while Lavis joined Graham Parker for the recording of 1983's *The Real Macaw*. Although Squeeze could be classified as a successful venture, their career bore disheartening testimony to the fact that good songs, good musicianship, good taste and good ideas are not enough to overcome the vagaries of pop fashion.

JOHN VOYSEY

Squeeze
Recommended Listening

Cool For Cats (A&M AMLH 68503) (Includes: Cool For Cats, The Knack, Up The Junction, Slap And Tickle, Slightly Drunk, Revue); *East Side Story* (A&M AMLH 64854) (Includes: Messed Around, Someone Else's Heart, Tempted, Piccadilly, Mumbo Jumbo, Labelled With Love).

YESTERDAY ONCE MORE

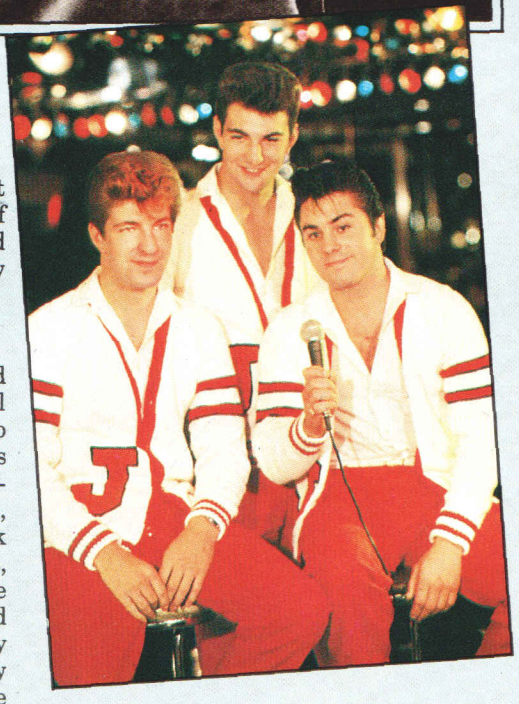


How Eighties pop echoed the hits of the past

IN THE EIGHTIES, mass unemployment returned to the UK for the first time in half a century. Rock, ever reflective of the mood of the times, accompanied the economy into recession.

Pretty but dumb

Ever since the mid Seventies, there had been indications that rock was coming full circle. Groups like Dr Feelgood had tried to break away from what was perceived as its increasing pretentiousness and emasculation by returning to the straightforward, hard-hitting style of late-Fifties rock 'n'roll. Their albums comprised short, high-energy songs while their appearance – short hair, together with ties, jackets and narrow-bottomed trousers – similarly rejected the prevailing styles of the day (loon pants and long hair) to embrace the fashions of the Fifties. The punk movement consolidated this change of emphasis by going back to the beginnings of rock 'n'roll in the mid Fifties to rediscover its raucous, fiery verve.



The songs of such Fifties stars as Perry Como (top) were revived by Eighties bands like the Jets (above).

By the Eighties, these links with the Fifties had strengthened. The most obvious factor was that popular music was, once more, 'pop'. In the late Sixties 'pop' had evolved into 'rock', but by the Eghties it had resumed its former character. Rock music had always harboured artistic or intellectual pretensions, however spurious. Pop had none – it was fun, immediate and innocuous. Its re-emergence could be attributed to the fact that rock had reached a cul-de-sac and that it simply seemed time for a change.

Its revival could also be explained by the harsh economic situation. The high-mindedness of rock suddenly became out of place as young people understandably felt the need for music of a purely escapist nature.

At the same time, the amount of money teenagers had to spend on records had fallen; they could no longer afford expensive LPs and so purchased singles instead. Record companies, faced with declining revenue, reacted by raising the prices of albums, thereby providing even less of an incentive to buy them; the single once more became the predominant artefact of popular music.

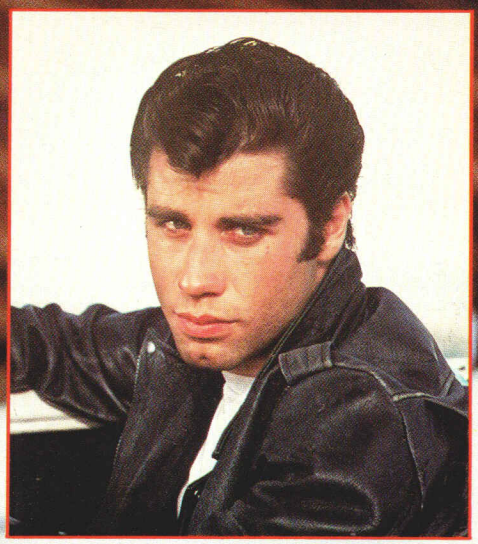
Singles were obviously designed to have an immediate impact on the listener; this meant that bands concentrated on achieving an attractive overall sound rather than on musical or lyrical subtlety. Lyrics, in particular, diminished in importance; most fans did not buy Duran Duran's records for the wisdom of their words. Culture Club's 'I'll Tumble 4 Ya' exemplified the subordinate role of lyrics in the new pop music; the song virtually consisted of a repetition of the title phrase.

In the early and mid Fifties, some of the lyrics of rock'n'roll songs (such as those by Chuck Berry and Leiber and Stoller) had been very clever, but by the end of the deade they had become more functional and less interesting.

Picture pop

As the economic recession helped make pop commercially and aesthetically attractive once more, a pop star's appearance became as important as his or her music – recalling the Fifties, when the faces of film stars had launched a thousand glossy magazines. Early rock performers, often regarded as poor man's movie stars, had been marketed in a similar way. In the Eighties the pattern was re-established; if anything, a performer's photogenic qualities took precedence over his musical abilities.

Reflecting this trend, the Eighties saw a resurgence of the type of magazine that relied for its appeal as much on pictorial as on journalistic quality. The groundbreaker in this respect was *Smash Hits*, launched by Nick Logan, which made liberal use of photographs and adopted an easy-to-read presentation. Within three years it had overtaken *New Musical Express* as the UK's leading popular music



The late-Seventies rockabilly revival was fuelled by the style of John Travolta in Grease *(above) and the Stray Cats' guitarist Brian Setzer (right).*

publication. While the circulations of the traditional rock weeklies went into what appeared to be an irreversible decline, those of the 'photo mags' began to soar. Having seen which way the cookie was crumbling, *Record Mirror* transformed itself from a tabloid newspaper to a small, glossy magazine format.

Nick Logan then moved from *Smash Hits* to start the *Face*, a magazine whose very title emphasised that style was the name of the rock game in the Eighties. This attitude was reminiscent of the Fifties, but the parallels extended in many cases to the actual fashions that were featured in the *Face*'s pages.

There are those who will claim that the James Dean/Marlon Brando persona had never been out of fashion, but in the Eighties it was right back in vogue, having been re-popularised primarily by John Travolta in the 1978 movie *Grease*. The leather-jacketed rocker image was later adopted by groups as diverse as punk-rockers the Clash and teen-heroes Wham!

Above: Mari Wilson in full Fifties regalia, complete with 'bee-hive' hairdo. Below: Shakin' Stevens – Wales' Eighties answer to Elvis Presley.

Only rock'n'roll?

With the whole nature of the pop market increasingly assuming characteristics of the Fifties, it was only to be expected that there would be straightforward musical links between the two periods. Most notably, there were the Stray Cats, a three-man group whose leader, Brian Setzer, was obsessed with the pop icons of the Fifties. With Jim McDonnell and Lee 'Rocker' Drucker, he formed a group committed to playing the kind of rockabilly music that had been neglected since the passing of the Fifties. The Stray Cats took their musical stance from such artists as Carl Perkins and Johnny Burnette and, with their leather gear and extravagant greaser hairstyles, captured the look of, as well as sounded like, those vintage Fifties performers.

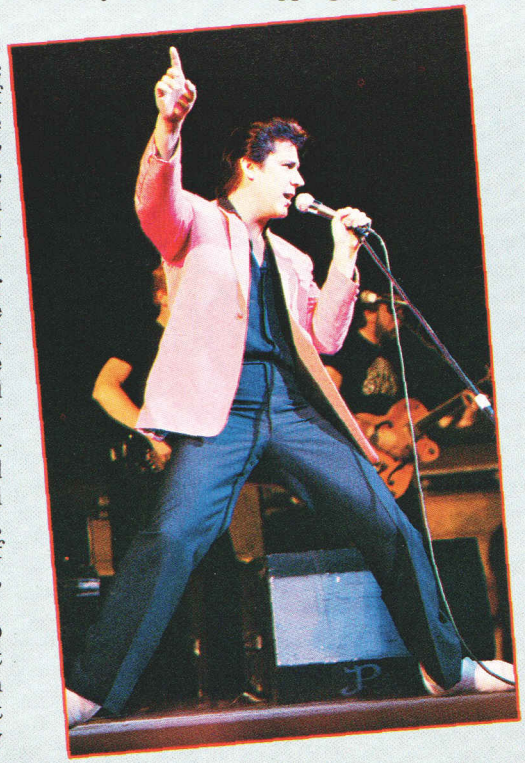
They built a reputation playing clubs in the UK, and purveyed such an authentic sound that they came to the attention of rock'n'roll devotee Dave Edmunds. He produced their debut album, *The Stray Cats* (1981), which attracted considerable attention and provided UK hit singles in 'Runaway Boys', 'Stray Cat Strut' and 'Rock This Town'.

In the final analysis, however, their success was solid but not spectacular in the UK; in the US, they took off in sensational style after being the support band on the Rolling Stones' 1981 US tour. It seemed strange that a group so obviously time-lagged should suddenly become so fashionable; but their voguishness was proved beyond doubt by the fact that McDonnell became engaged to film star Britt Ekland, who had hovered at or near the vortex of rock fashion since the early Seventies, notably as the girlfriend of Rod Stewart.

The tactic of recreating the Fifties also paid off handsomely for Shakin' Stevens. It was perhaps significant that he had been performing as a rock revivalist for at least 10 years, but it was only in the early Eighties that he shot to stardom. Then there was Bananarama, who represented a mini-revival of the all-girl vocal trio, a particularly popular style of the Fifties and Sixties. Bananarama's 1983 hit 'Cruel Summer' returned to the adolescent preoccupations of that period that had been reflected in such contemporary songs as Carole King's 'It Might As Well Rain Until September'.

Revival of the fittest

Several songs from the pre-Beatle period of rock were also successfully revived; Shirley Ellis' 'The Clapping Song' became a hit for all-girl group the Belle Stars, while Mari Wilson successfully covered Julie London's 'Cry Me A River'. It suddenly became fashionable to plunder a store of Fifties and early Sixties recordings that had hitherto been thought of as hopelessly 'uncool' by rock artists: Modern Romance had a Top Ten hit with 'Cherry Pink And Apple Blossom White', a major 1955 hit for trumpeter Eddie Calvert; rockabilly revivalists the Jets had a minor hit with an engaging rendition of a Perry Como song, 'Love Makes The World Go Round'; the Piranhas revived the South African *kwela* 'Tom Hark', and Tight Fit had a Number 1 hit with The Tokens' 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight'. Shakin' Stevens himself, though closely modelling himself on Elvis Presley, delved further back for two of his major hits, Rosemary Clooney's 1955 hit 'This Ole House' and 'Green Door', a US Number 1 for Jim Lowe a quarter of a century earlier in 1956.



Swinging again

As Fifties styles began to lose some of their novelty value by the early Eighties, those of the Sixties also came into vogue in the UK. Sixties nostalgia was fuelled by the re-running of hit TV series such as 'The Avengers', 'The Prisoner' and 'Rowan And Martin's Laugh-In'. Record companies took note of the new trend, re-releasing LPs by Sixties artists ranging from the Kinks and Manfred Mann to Scott Walker and Honor Blackman. Stars as diverse as Billy Joel, Siouxsie and the Banshees and Tracey Ullman all profited by cashing in on Sixties musical fashions.

While jaded cynics might scoff at the lack of so-called 'original' ideas that pop music seemed to offer in the Eighties, there was no denying the exciting variety of images and musical styles on show, with artists rummaging through the fashions of bygone eras – whether rock'n'roll, acid rock or glam-rock – in a mad free-for-all.

BOB WOFFINDEN

THE GREAT MUSICIANS

Simon Kirke

As drummer with Bad Company and Free, Simon Kirke has enjoyed a long and illustrious career at the top of his profession. Starting out in the mid Sixties in a blues band called Black Cat Bones, Kirke became a founder member of Free in 1968; it was with this band that he accomplished his most enduring and influential work. Although Kirke had none of the lightning-fast chops of great jazz-rockers like Billy Cobham or Simon Phillips, nor the high-energy attack of John Bonham or Stewart Copeland, he developed a distinctive, sparse, muscular style that remains a model of economy.

Free started at a time when the vogue was for drummers to play faster and flashier on ever larger drum kits. Mitch Mitchell's explosive contribution to the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Keith Moon's wild antics with the Who and Ginger Baker's poly-rhythmic soloing with Cream set the trend for enormous drum kits. The popular art of drumming became increasingly frenetic, and the drummer's role that of supporting soloist.

Against this backdrop Kirke emerged as a player of stark and striking simplicity. His Premier kit incorporated only the most basic features: snare, bass drum, one mounted tom, one floor tom, a hi-hat and only two cymbals. His particular trademark was to play fourths (four beats in the bar) on the hi-hat as opposed to eighths, the usual style of the vast majority of players. This gave his playing a metronomic effect that he then embellished with single and double beats on the bass drum and a caustic, cracking snare on the second and fourth beats in the bar. The most famous example was Free's 1970 hit 'All Right Now', in which the rigid fourths were emphasised by a cowbell played in unison with the hi-hat throughout the verses. The effect was refreshingly uncomplicated and turned out to be a perennially popular dance rhythm.

Kirke kept most of his fills similarly simple. Many of them were loose, slow, single-stroke rolls, but one trick he was particularly fond of – which again found its way into the work of many other players – was the use of simple snare-flam and bass-drum combinations. (The onomatopoeic 'flam' is where the drum is hit *almost* simultaneously by the two sticks, producing a resounding, echoed single beat.) For instance, the end of each chorus of 'I'll Be Creeping' on *Free* (1969) was whipped into the following verse by classic Kirke bass and snare cracks that established the pace of the song far more forcefully than the usual clattery rolls around the kit would have done.

While a member of Free, and subsequently Bad Company, Kirke was a master of the slow tempo. Throughout the bump and grind of 'Fire And Water', the title track of a 1970 album, the gentle ballad 'Be My Friend' on *Highway* (1971) and the boogie raunch of Bad Company's debut single 'Can't Get Enough' in 1974, the actual pace of the songs was uniformly slow. Andy Fraser, Free's bassist was also a player of distinctive economy, and tempos that would have seemed leaden in less capable hands had a definite jauntiness when played by Fraser and Kirke. 'I'm A Mover' on *Free Live* (1971) proceeded at a crushingly slow pace, but swung nevertheless. Kirke developed a similar empathy with Bad Company's Boz Burrell and their brand of rocksteady heavy-bass thump percolated through to the Eighties via groups like David Coverdale's Whitesnake and AC/DC.

In the early Seventies Kirke changed to Ludwig drums, which he used for over 10 years. As Bad Company began to run out of steam towards the end of the decade, Kirke's playing became distinctly mellower. 1982's *Rough Diamonds* (recorded in 1979) showed very little of the heavy-on-the-beat aggression that characterised his previous work, and there were a lot more eighths on the hi-hat – although this development grew out of the specific musical requirements of the songs as much as it indicated a change in Kirke's basic style.

In 1983 Kirke began work with a new band called Wildlife, and his playing on their self-titled debut album showed a return to a beefier sound. His drum set-up remained much the same, although he had adopted a Pearl kit while retaining the Ludwig snare. He also added a Simmons drum synth (two pads) and a few extra cymbals. He favours a Gretsch kit for recording purposes.

As well as contributing generously to the catalogue of rock drumming styles, Kirke has shown to many aspiring players that an individual approach and strong feel for their craft can be more important than advanced technical skills and impressive arrays of equipment. The rigorous economy of his style, the brute forcefulness of his approach and the simple feel for his music have made Simon Kirke a highly influential drummer. DAVID SINCLAIR

Below left: Simon Kirke keeps Bad Company. Below and overleaf: Keeping time the Kirke way.

THE HISTORY OF

Rock